

An Evaluation of The Availability of Learning Materials for Ecde at the Teachers Advisory Centres In Kenya

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Abstract

The focus of this study was to investigate if Teachers Advisory Centres (TACs) in Wareng District, Kenya are equipped with learning materials useful for ECDE. This work was based on Chris Argyris' intervention theory. Forty (40) head teachers, 111 ECD teachers and 125 lower primary school teachers participated in the study. Descriptive survey research design was adapted for the study. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were used to obtain the samples. Data for the study was collected using questionnaire, observation checklist and interview schedule. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis. The study established that although the provision of learning materials was central to the mission of the TACs, they were equipped with very few materials which were neither well organized nor sufficient to be borrowed by teachers. The researcher hopes that the findings will be useful to teachers and policy makers in enhancement of the utilization of the TACs for the provision of learning materials for better teaching in early childhood in Kenya. The study proposes that the TAC be well facilitated and equipped so as to support teachers in delivering the curriculum effectively.

Key words: evaluation, availability, learning materials

1. Introduction

The use of teaching and learning materials in Early Childhood Education (ECD) and indeed any other level cannot be overemphasized. Teachers Advisory Centres (Resource Centres) are units in the Ministry of education which were established in the 1940s to serve a cluster of schools. Ideally a cluster comprises of five to fifteen schools. A major goal of clusters and resource centres is to provide pupils and teachers with access to learning materials, especially in rural areas and small schools. Resource centres allow teachers to drop in and borrow or use materials including teacher-made materials, supplementary texts, teacher guides, curriculum guides, science equipment, maps and charts and other audio-visual aids for the classroom (www.unesco.org/iiep, Retrieved on 23rd Sep 2010).

In some countries, lavishly equipped centres cater for almost every conceivable need of teachers, while in others only simple facilities are provided. In certain countries, centres have responded to the needs of particular groups of teachers or catered for teachers in specialized teaching, with the result that they have changed the general character of a teachers' centre as serving all teachers and turned them virtually into subject laboratories. The least satisfactory type of pattern, which is the case in many Centres, is that in which a place has been called a teachers' centre in order to keep in step with educational fashion, but has been denied sufficient resources to enable it to provide any useful service.

2. Meaning and function of a resource centre

NACECE, (1996) avers that a resource centre may be regarded as a concept, an idea, or a place that facilitates the development of and sharing of talents, skills, knowledge and innovations. One would expect to find a variety of resources such as toys, books, magazines, games, models of relevant technology which are designed to meet the learning needs of users and various target groups. People who meet and exchange experiences are also a central resource

Farrant (1999) states that a resource centre is involved in collecting resources, organizing them and making them available to users. It is involved in informing people of new resources and of new ideas. It organizes training and facilitates development of ideas and of new resources. It should tap peoples' ideas and skills and help them realize their ability to influence and change their own lives. The centre should make people contribute to their own learning and development. A resource centre should be a place filled with people sharing ideas, coming for advice or borrowing materials that can make them better teachers or caregivers for the children.

Farrant goes further to state the main functions of a teachers' centre, which are to provide: *in-service training*, which is done usually by lectures, films and conferences in which teachers discuss with experts the problems that face them in their work, to provide seminars and workshops in which practical solutions to current difficulties

are hammered out and materials required for implementing these solutions are devised and produced, exhibitions in which teachers are introduced to new textbooks, teaching materials, equipment, etc, to help them in their work.. Also exhibitions of children's work in neighborhood schools to give teachers an idea of the standards being achieved. Another function of a teachers' centre is to *provide workshop facilities*. These are provided to enable teachers to produce their own teaching materials using duplicating and other reprographic equipment, photographic and other audio visual equipment, art and craft materials.

2.1 An ideal Teachers Advisory Centre

The facilities needed for a large resource centre as listed by Farrant (1999) are: Administrative offices, a multi media lending or reference library with a system of classification, cataloguing, and storage that enables users to find what they want without difficulty. Also needed are facilities for individual and small group listening and viewing, a studio with technical facilities for all kinds of photographic work and video and audio recording. A production room with equipment for all kinds of copying, stenciling and printing offering a service at a cost to individual teachers is also a requirement for a resource centre and a workshop with the necessary tools and materials to enable teachers make their own teaching aids. In addition, there has to be maintenance workshops with staff and equipment for dealing with the repair of broken technical equipment, a multi-purpose room in which meetings and exhibitions can be held and an evaluation and advisory unit for providing teachers with advice on new teaching material or technical equipment.

According to Farrant (1999) much effectiveness of a teachers' centre depends on how well it is organized and how effectively teachers are informed of the services it provides and the programmes it offers. Ordering and organizing the contents of a resource centre demands a librarian's skills, for otherwise, the materials are likely to be too muddled to be used efficiently or too lacking in balance to meet the needs of all the users.

In essence a resource centre should be able to lay the foundation for acquiring information, skills and knowledge for personal enrichment, leisure and recreation (NACECE, 1996). It should provide in-service training, workshop facilities, congenial social environment and informal, friendly relations. Lancaster and Gaunt (1976) note that many Teachers' Centres provide a location for pooling expensive resources, some of which can be hired out to schools for varying periods. The centres have become places where information can be collected, debated and sometimes processed for distribution to teachers. Knamiller (1999) avers that Resource centres also furnish teachers with a place to prepare and produce classroom materials, as well as a store room for these materials. Teachers can collect local materials free of charge to make displays or to illustrate a lesson. This is the case in the teacher centres in Andhra Pradesh in India, in the Aga Khan SIP teacher Advisory centres in Kenya, and in the TRCs in Nepal, among others. Brown & Halliday (1995) state that teacher resource centre can also supply a place to document, catalogue and diffuse these teacher-generated curricula, materials and innovations.

2.2 Learning materials

Materials are things that are needed in order to do a particular activity (Advanced oxford learners dictionary). Kochar (1991) defines learning materials/aids as devices which present units of knowledge through auditory or visual stimuli or both with a view to help learning. A teaching material is therefore any kind of aid whether audio or visual used by the class teacher to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The central role of teaching materials is to support teaching by making ideas and concepts clear and making learning interesting and vivid. Teaching/ materials can be invaluable in promoting motivation and retention. Kasambira (1993) states a Chinese proverb which says one picture is worth a thousand words. He argues that this statement is true because good teaching materials have eye and ear appeal. Kochar (1991) asserts that learning materials concretize the knowledge to be presented and thus help in making a learning experience appear real, living and vital. They supplement the spoken word, develop concepts, and improve attitudes and extent appreciations and interests. They help in making learning permanent and supplement the material of the textbooks. Audio-visual aids, in fact, are supplementary devices by which the teacher, through the utilization of more than one sensory channel, can help to clarify, establish and correlate accuracy, concepts, interpretations and appreciations and to make learning alive and interesting.

Bishop (1995) opines that for effective and quality teaching and learning, there must be adequate resources. Basic to the success of any attempt at curriculum implementation and improvement is the preparation of suitable textbooks, teachers' guides and other teaching and learning materials. These teaching/learning materials support the teacher in delivering his information. When the teacher has to hand tools for the job, his confidence, his effectiveness, his productivity, all increase. With better tools, his professional capabilities are more fully utilized and he accomplishes larger and better results.

Indumuli et al. (2000) state that concrete and proper use of teaching/learning aids often gives concrete representation to most abstract ideas and thus makes their meanings clearer. Teaching/learning aids are therefore

essential and useful tools because they promote understanding of concepts and principles, they enrich and enliven teaching, they concentrate interest and attention, they speed up communication and thereby make the teaching process more efficient and effective. They also make pupils remember more of what they learn.

To reinforce teaching, a rich galaxy of audio visual aids will have to be harnessed. This galaxy of materials has been classified by Kochar (1991) in to the following categories: the printed aids, the visual aids, the audio-aids and the audio-visual aids. The printed materials include periodicals, books and newspapers. Among the visual aids are slides, film strips, models, graphs and charts, pictorial materials, globes and maps. Some of the audio aids are tape recordings, phonograph discs and radio. The audio-visual aids are motion pictures, television and dramatization. NACECE (2001), states that a variety of materials should be provided to cater for different ages, interests and developmental levels of children. Materials should also cater for all aspects of growth and development of children.

However, a study carried out on school clusters and Teacher Resource Centres, (Khatete, 2000) indicates that operating conditions currently imposed on many teacher resource programmes do not allow them to play their part in improving the quality of education. The study recommended that in order to be effective, resource centres cannot be mere storehouses of materials, of which some are out-of-date and located in buildings accessible only through long travel and open only during school hours. Such infrastructure can only be of service if resource centres are well-equipped and staffed with competent and committed tutors playing a real support role for teachers and serving as motivators and mentors for teacher development and improved classroom practice. It was therefore against this backdrop that this study set out to establish if TACs in Wareng District are equipped with learning materials necessary to serve the aforementioned purposes.

3. The findings

According to NACECE (1996), a resource centre is involved in collecting resources, organizing them and making them available to users. It also facilitates development of ideas and new resources. Pertinent issues discussed in this study include the analysis and presentation of the responses to the items that dealt with the views of teachers towards availability and organization of learning materials at the TACs as shown on Table 1. In NACECE (2001) it is said that the success of any Resource Centre is measured by how well the resources are organized. If resources are poorly organized or not organized at all, then it is likely that they are lost and not well utilized. The study therefore also looked at organization of the materials.

3.1 Availability of office materials

To be effective as a teachers' centre of support, it is imperative for the TAC to be well endowed with the necessary tools and materials for administrative use and for teachers to draw from. Through an open ended question in the interview schedule, the TAC tutors were asked to give an approximate number of the sum total of the materials they had in the TAC. The highest approximate number of materials in the TACs was 250 (Table 2), one TAC had about 167, two had about 100, yet another had just about 50. This comprised all the types of materials including charts, maps and course books put together.

3.2 Utilization of the learning materials

Proper facilities, infrastructure and professional reference books are a must for an efficient and effective Teachers Advisory Centre. Whatever is available at the TAC is a reflection of the dominant activities there. Table 3 shows the office materials found in the five zones in Wareng District and whether they were utilized or not. The result from the observation check list shows that most of the materials that the study targeted were missing apart from visitors books which were available in 4 (80%) TACs, monthly work programmes which every TAC tutor kept and furniture which were found in every centre. Charts and pictures were spotted in 3 centres during observation. None of the five TACs had materials displayed within the centre. The few materials seen in the 3 centres were old and dusty and stack against each other in a corner. All the five TACs did not have a TAC building but were housed in small rooms in the primary schools.

3.3 Display and storage

Table 4 contains information of what was observed in the TACs during the study and also from the interviews with the TAC tutors.

It was evident that there was hardly any material on display and therefore no order could be witnessed on display and storage of materials.

4. Conclusion

Basing on the teachers' and TAC tutors reports, it was evident that the TACs had failed to play their role in providing learning materials to the school population. The TACs were equipped with very few materials which

were neither well organized nor sufficient to be borrowed by teachers though relevant to the syllabus that was in place at the time of study.

All the TAC tutors in the five zones reported to have not more than 250 materials at their centres (all the materials like text books, charts and maps put together). The state of the few text books and visual aids was pathetic; they were old, dirty and torn and were haphazardly stacked against each other. There was total disarray on arrangement and order of the materials and there was no record of the materials owned by the TACs or showing the flow of materials in and out of the centre. The only available records were visitors' books and work programmes and files with monthly returns from schools. It was also evident that the resources at the TAC were believed not to meet the needs of children with special needs.

It is regrettable that the teachers rarely received information resources from the TAC. The only group that seemed to be in contact with TAC information was the head teachers'. There was clear indication that the TACs have gone against the TAC hand book that stipulates that a TAC tutor has to keep good financial and administrative records for the TAC; complete records of all resources in the TAC and record of any loaning of books or equipment to schools was of particular interest in this case.

There was overwhelming evidence from the study that although the provision of learning materials was salient to the mission of the TACs, they had shifted away from this mission. No wonder dissatisfaction was rife among the teachers that information and material resources could not be acquired from the TAC. Basing on this report; we can conclude that the TAC is failing to meet its objectives as a support service to teachers in production and use of learning materials for effective curriculum implementation in ECDE in Wareng District.

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Table 1: Teachers' opinions on the availability, organization and relevance of learning materials

	Designation								
	Head teachers			ECD teachers			Lower Primary teachers		
Statement: At the TAC	(N)	Mean	SD	(N)	Mean	SD	(N)	Mean	SD
There are many learning materials available for teachers to borrow	(40)	2.1750	1.1522	(87)	2.9540	1.2932	(81)	2.4568	1.323
Learning materials are well organized	(40)	2.1750	1.1958	(87)	2.8966	1.2485	(80)	2.5875	1.3187
The available learning materials have consideration for special needs for ECD and lower primary school	(40)	2.1000	1.1047	(87)	2.7701	1.4523	(80)	2.3750	1.1946
The TAC provides information on how and where materials can be collected or borrowed	(40)	2.600	1.4464	(87)	2.9655	1.3420	(80)	2.6875	1.1969
Materials displayed at the TAC are current	(40)	3.0250	1.3298	(87)	3.1655	1.3165	(80)	3.0375	1.2969
The resources available at the TAC are relevant to the syllabus currently in use	(40)	3.2750	1.2192	(87)	3.5632	1.2172	(80)	3.3250	1.2198
The resources are arranged in designated subject areas	(40)	3.0250	1.3104	(87)	3.2644	1.3334	(80)	3.0000	1.3120

This table is a reflection of the teacher's perceptions on the materials stocked at the TAC

Table 2: Approximate number of materials available at the TAC

Zone	Approximate No. of materials (text books, charts, maps)
Kapsaret	167
Tulwet	50
Kesses	250
Cheptiret	96
Timboroa	100

Table 2 shows the approximate number of all materials seen at the TACs

Table 3: Availability and utilization of office material

	Available	Utilized
Material	% N=5	% N=5
Visitor's book	80	80
Record of resources in the TAC	0	0
Course Record Book	0	0
Monthly work program/reports	100	40
TAC management committee file	40	0
Charts/pictures/maps	20	0
Realia (objects/specimens)	0	0
Infrastructure		
TAC building	0	0
Furniture	100	100
Store	0	0
Duplication/photocopying machine	0	0
Multipurpose hall	0	0
Others (Motorbikes)	60	20

This table indicates the responses from an interview with the TAC tutors indicating what they thought was the highest number of materials in their centres.

Table 4: Display/ storage

	Yes	No
	N=5	N=5
Designation of subject areas	0	5
Age (Are they current?)	0	5
Relevance (to syllabus currently in use)	3	2
Attractiveness (quality of lettering, layout and arrangement)	0	5
Storage (in polythene ,on shelves, in special room)	0	5

Table 4 shows the result of the state of learning materials as observed at the TAC.

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